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AN ADDRESS

TO THE

FELLOWS OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE  
OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND.


BY

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# AN ADDRESS

TO THE

## FELLOWS OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND.

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GENTLEMEN,

HAVING, in consequence of an attack of illness, thought it necessary to retire from public duties, I desired, in taking leave of those duties, as connected with the College of Surgeons, to bring under your notice a suggestion for an arrangement which I believe would be an improvement in the organization of our Department of the Medical Profession, a suggestion which I have long wished for an opportunity to bring under your notice.\*

In addressing you I imply that the consideration

\* The preparation of this letter has been unavoidably delayed since I retired from office.

of the measure I am about to propose—even its adoption, if that should be considered expedient, rests with the Fellows of the College. I imply that the subject is not within the province of the Council.

It may, perhaps, serve to excuse in a degree the unusual course taken in addressing you thus, if I remind you that I was for a lengthened period connected officially with the College, and that there is no other course by which I could place my views under notice. The duties that devolved on me in connection with the College, besides those attaching to a Member of the Council, were those of :

A Member of the Court of Examiners ; those of  
The Representative of the College in the  
‘ General Medical Council of Education  
and Examination ; ’ and those of  
President.

I would only add to these prefatory remarks that the subject to which I shall now ask attention was

mentioned by me, but under a different form, more than twenty years ago; and that my observation since that time has not diminished the strength of the feeling that the interests of our profession would be advanced by the adoption in some form of the plan I am about to propose. Such being the opinion I entertain, to place the matter under the consideration of those whom it most concerns, is simply a duty.

It is with a feeling of duty to that Profession, to which I owe deep gratitude, that I now turn to the special object of this letter:—I have often heard Fellows of the College, actively engaged in practice at a distance from London, complain of the manner in which the annual elections to the Council are carried out, in consequence of the loss of time and the inconvenience occasioned by their coming to London—it may be a long distance, merely to place a voting-paper in the box. At the Annual Meeting for election to vacant places in the Council, nothing further is or can be permitted where the voting is being

carried on. As a remedy for the inconvenience, the desire has been expressed that authority should be obtained to allow the voting-papers, properly authenticated, being sent through the post-office. To the convenience and advisability of that method of voting, I, individually, should perhaps have been inclined to assent, had I not in mind a use for the annual visit to the metropolis which might make it really beneficial to the Fellows of the College, and to the Members as well—to the whole Profession.

The government of the Profession being vested virtually in itself, it might perhaps be inferred that, however well the Governing Council may be constituted, the members of the body, even individually, owe to their Profession and to the public the duty to give thought and effort from time to time towards the removal of any defect, or to help forward any object calculated to promote the general interest.

While any controlling influence of the Fellows in any form as to the details of the affairs of the College would involve the necessity of a new Charter,

the proposal I wish to offer for consideration is wholly independent of the Charter and of the duties imposed by it on the Council and on the Fellows.

That proposal may be indicated in a few sentences, which, for clearness' sake, I would place in some form, but in as general terms as possible. They are as follows :—

*a.* That the Fellows should hold a General Meeting annually, on or about the day for the election to vacancies in the Council ; or at any time that may be thought expedient.

At such Meetings might, with notice, be considered matters of general importance to the Profession.

*b.* That a standing Committee be formed at a General Meeting, to be constituted in certain proportions of the Fellows resident in London and those residing in the country.

Upon subjects of importance information might be communicated to General Meetings by the Fellows present at the meeting and by the Committee. Facts



having relation to the Profession are diffused over the whole land. To whom can those facts be so well known as to those who are diffused as widely as the facts? By whom can the facts be so well scrutinized—so accurately reported? Such facts examined and appreciated by General Meetings, would form the basis of satisfactory judgment on many of the affairs of the Profession. The process would likewise give important aid to the Governing Council.

The Committee would, perhaps, make reports on subjects referred by the Fellows at their General Meetings, and on matters of importance generally occurring in the intervals of those Meetings.

Moreover, to the Committee, if authorized for the purpose, might be referred by the persons concerned the consideration and arrangement of sources of personal difference on professional matters between members of the Profession, whether Fellows or Members.

The foregoing outline has been traced merely that it may be seen what methods of proceeding are sug-



gested to the mind of one member of the Profession. But the objects and the plans of proceeding would only be determined at a meeting of the Fellows, and probably by a Committee appointed to carry out the desire of the Fellows as agreed on at the meeting. Some examination of the Regulations of other Corporations—medical and surgical—would probably afford indications as to rules which ought to be adopted or avoided by the Fellows of our College.

It is scarcely possible to point out beforehand the quality of the subjects that may fitly claim consideration at the General Meetings. The varying phases of change or suggestion of change that occur from time to time in much that concerns a Profession will indicate what may suitably call for the expression of the general opinion of the body. I might suggest, for sake of illustration, subjects which would now usefully occupy attention at a General Meeting such as is contemplated. But the reports of parliamentary proceedings in newspapers show that just now there

is no need of search—no need of selection. At this moment an important subject stands prominently out. An effort for legislation, gravely affecting the Profession, is, we have learnt from the newspapers, before Parliament; and it would be well that those Fellows of the College and the Members also, who have not already given the measure their attention, should do so. May not, then, the Bill now passing through Parliament be a fit subject for the consideration of a General Meeting of our body?

The General Meeting of Fellows contemplated in this letter, would not, it may be needless to say, exercise control over the regulations or deliberations of the Governing Council. Its voice or vote would not have direct influence on the conduct of the affairs of the College. The public expression of opinion by the Profession would, nevertheless, always have its influence. It would work effect according to its worth, just as the general public opinion exercises an influence over public affairs and governing bodies among Englishmen.

It might moreover be added that, should such voluntary meetings be held for a time and appear to the Profession to be useful, there would be little difficulty in having the arrangement engrafted on the organisation of the College. For that purpose, a supplement to the Charter might be obtained, and with, probably, the concurrence of the Council of the College. The system would have some resemblance to the 'Convocation' of Universities.\*

Again, a few words as to the Committee:—That body, as before indicated, would probably be engaged in looking to matters of general interest, and would place them under the notice of the Fellows at General Meetings or otherwise.

Another function has been mentioned among the duties that might devolve on a standing Committee; namely, the consideration and, if it may be, the

\* Convocation in the newest university (London) includes all graduates. But while those who have taken the higher degrees are admitted at once, a certain time must have elapsed after the lower degrees have been obtained before the graduates are admissible to convocation.

adjustment of subjects of difference between individual members of the Profession—the subjects being thought not unworthy of such notice.

The experience of many will probably recall to their minds cases in which the existence of a permanent professional Committee accessible for reference might have prevented painful results to one, or more than one, of the persons between whom differences had arisen. Of the use of such reference I would give an illustration:—

In an important medical institution far distant from London, a matter of painful discussion having arisen, an agreement was arrived at with the governing body to refer the matter for adjudication to a member of the Profession in London. Accordingly, statements of a few persons conversant with the facts in question were forwarded by the Chairman, with the request that the Referee should undertake the consideration of the subject, and communicate his judgment upon it. This course was taken; and the official reply stated the result to be satisfactory.

A few words respecting another case, one of a different kind :—One of the candidates for an appointment to office in a hospital, called on a member of the staff, who at the time happened to be a candidate for re-election to the Council of the College of Surgeons, and said ‘I will attack you in [a medical periodical named] if you oppose my election at —— Hospital.’ The compact was declined. The governing body of the hospital was not informed of the incident.—That threat would not probably have been carried into effect, would not have been spoken it may be, if such a Committee of Reference as is contemplated had then been in existence.

To conclude this letter, which I hoped to have made shorter, I would fain ask—May it not be anticipated that the body of Fellows of the College, if associated in their General Meetings and with their Committee constituted to represent our Profession as a whole, shall in time by a natural process of development come to be fully organised?—May it not be anticipated also that being so organised—gathering

in, by association, the intelligence and knowledge now scattered abroad and wanting force from want of cohesion,—the united body shall come to exercise a salutary authority over its individual component parts; and shall also come to work a beneficial effect on the growth of its own usefulness and influence with society, as well as on that material help to usefulness and influence—its own dignity?

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,

Your faithful Servant,

R. QUAIN.

32, CAVENDISH SQUARE, LONDON,

*June, 1878.*

*To the Fellows of the Royal College  
of Surgeons of England.*

